Urban Land Use by Illegal Armed Groups in Medellin

by Geoffrey Demarest

This article poses ideas about counterinsurgency, law enforcement and stability operations in the context of ‗land-use planning.‗ Land–use planning carries many of today‗s dominant theoretical currents as to centralized direction of urban life.[1] Here, seven proposed categories of illegal slum land use are tested against a recent, complex Latin American case. Admittedly, this application of the term ―land use‖ may be overly literal, and is to be distinguished from ―land-use planning.‖ That latter term generally connotes a set of theoretical norms and objectives centered, in part, on the concept of ‗sustainability‗ (often presented in planning literature as a balance or reconciliation of environmental stewardship, social equity and economic maximization).[2] Land-use planning also connotes a specialized set of opinions and plans coming from persons whom we can stereotype as technocratic and bureaucratic – as governmental.

Government land-use planning in Medellín, Colombia has sought to achieve the values supposed by ‗sustainability,‗ but in the process has had to wrest land-use dominance from violent illegal armed groups, and to provide the population physical security and conflict resolution services. In such a violently conflictive urban geography, land-use planning has to account for illegal, violent land use. In the long run, attainment of basic sustainability goals facilitates peaceful social contracts, but, in the nearer term, some aspects of urban design must directly address ease in policing and perhaps even effectiveness of military operations. If experiences in Medellín foretell anything, it is that security planners‗ conversation will necessarily shift toward land use, and the conversation of land-use planners toward security.

Non-autochthonous (outsider) illegal armed groups (IAG) pursue and enjoy eight principal, overlapping uses of urban slum land in relation to their illicit pursuits. These eight land uses, in no particular order, are: 1. taxation; 2. free trade; 3. sanctuary; 4. clandestine manufacture or processing; 5. staging for violent operations outside the slum; 6. safe transit of contraband; 7. recruiting; and 8. as a prison or graveyard for their victims. The eight categories could be used as part of taxonomy for geographic profiling (predictive geographic forensics).[3] The IAG land-use categories are suitable as variables (field descriptions or attribute names – the

---

[1] See generally, for instance, Philip Berke, et al, *Urban Land Use Planning, Fifth Edition* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006).

[2] Ibid., p. 10.

[3] A GIS-based urban field research effort was conducted in Medellín in 2008. Local researchers sought expanded methodological guidance, and, along with violent acts, land use became one conflict-related phenomenon the research attempted to map. Their research and mapping sought out other directions and phenomena as well, including, for instance, human fear. For a relevant bibliography on Medellín, see, David J. Keeling, BOWMAN EXPEDITION TO COLOMBIA, The American Geographical Society, http://www.amergeog.org/bowman-colombia.htm.

October 17, 2011

	Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188
Report Documentation Page	

Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.

1. REPORT DATE **17 OCT 2011**	2. REPORT TYPE	3. DATES COVERED **00-00-2011 to 00-00-2011**

4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE **Urban Land Use by Illegal Armed Groups in Medellin**	5a. CONTRACT NUMBER
	5b. GRANT NUMBER
	5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER
6. AUTHOR(S)	5d. PROJECT NUMBER
	5e. TASK NUMBER
	5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER

7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) **US Army Foreign Military Studies Office,Fort Leavenworth,KS,66027**	8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)	10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)
	11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)

12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT
Approved for public release; distribution unlimited

13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES

14. ABSTRACT

15. SUBJECT TERMS

16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT **unclassified**	b. ABSTRACT **unclassified**	c. THIS PAGE **unclassified**	**Same as Report (SAR)**	**10**	

titles of the columns at the top of an SQL spreadsheet perhaps) in a forensic police/military Geographic Information Systems (GIS) data table.[4]

While such use of GIS may be the most immediate or directly relevant application to government reduction of illegal armed groups, other uses, such as informing urban building and street design, may yield the more important longer–term security benefits. A correct GIS taxonomy, moreover, can speed the testing of broader insurgency and counterinsurgency theories and metrics, and hopefully fuel land-use planning strategies for building peaceful social contracts. It is probably safe to assert that the common sense possessed by experienced detectives remains the primary source of successful predictions regarding points and times where an IAG member or asset is likely to be found. It appears that such experiential common sense constitutes the backbone of police intelligence methods for anticipating criminal whereabouts in most foreign cities.[5] A more sophisticated epistemology, constructed as a GIS, can nevertheless improve, extend and accelerate common sense predictive victories. With that optimism in mind, we consider the case of Medellín, which has been one of the most complex and challenging urban battlefields on the planet.

Medellín, Colombia

Although some reference is made herein to other urban conflicts, the paper focuses on the case of *Comuna 13*, a borough in Medellín, Colombia, that suffered critical levels of internal violence in this first decade of the 21st century.[6] Although many IAGs were spawned within *Comuna 13*, outsider entities included drug cartels from greater Medellín and from other parts of Colombia, and revolutionary and paramilitary organizations born in other regions of Colombia. These latter groups were of greater concern to the formal Colombian governments at all levels, even if not to the *Comuna 13* neighbors. The individuals most able to control illicit land use within *Comuna 13* were often those most able to apply resources associated with the more powerful non-autochthonous IAGs.

Before considering each of the illegal land-use categories, some descriptive introduction to the Medellín area is warranted. Urbanized terrain inside and around the city of Medellín is home to a little over three million Colombians. It has at least since the early 19th century been a city of entrepreneurs and early adopters of technologies.[7] It felt all the various pulses of Latin America's accelerated 20th century migration to the cities, but in the late 1970s and early 1980s

---

[4] Geographic Information Systems have become indispensable tools for accelerating geographic profiling, with the most important function of that profiling being prediction of the whereabouts of criminal perpetrators and their assets.

[5] The search of control and speed human problem solving by aiding the processes of experience-based common sense is often called heuristics. We can say that geographic information science, with its relational databases and visual displays of spatial correlations, is a heuristic tool.

[6] As a principal source of this hypothesis, see Ricardo Aricapa, *Comuna 13: crónica de una Guerra urbana* (Borough 13: chronicle of an urban war) (Medellín: University of Antioquia, 2005). Of course, the assertion that autochthonous IAGs are less significant or dangerous than entities whose origins are from outside the slum may be overcome in a given case.

[7] For instance, a group of Medellín entrepreneurs established a commercial airline in September, 1919. See Mauricio Savena B., ―5 de diciembre de 1919,: Se funda SCADTA" in Planeta, *50 días que cambiaron la historia de Colombia* (Bogotá: Planeta, 2004), pp. 163-166. Unfortunately for the Antioqueños, they had selected French Farmas made of wood and fabric, while their rivals, from what would become Avianca, chose the German metal Junkers. Avianca claims to be the second oldest surviving airline in the world after KLM.

experienced a storm of urbanization.[8] That storm was formed by at least four identifiable contributors worthy of mention, as follows:

➤ Basic demographics – Medellín, in Colombia's northwest, is surrounded by one of Colombia's most densely populated rural areas, but itself sets at a disproportionately greater distance from other Colombian urban centers, thus being a more immediate magnet to a relatively greater surrounding population;[9]
➤ The countryside in counties of eastern Antioquia Department surrounding Medellín was a key battlespace in the accelerating insurgent war against the government of Colombia. People in those counties violently displaced were most likely to escape to Medellín;[10]
➤ Populist city leaders turned a blind eye to mass squatting in the cities peripheries, even encouraging it for electoral designs; and
➤ Medellín had always been (and is still) perceived as the Mecca of labor opportunity.

Those who migrated to the city, whether they compelled or not, did not necessarily find a peaceful alternative to their rural lives. Several other factors militated against a peaceful social environment, making Medellín not just one of hyper-accelerated growth, but one of the most violent cities in the world. Following are some of these factors:

a. In the context of the greater insurgent war, Medellín, due to its traditionally entrepreneurial ideological stamp and its seeming strategic vulnerability, became a territorial objective in an urban strategy of the principal insurgent guerrilla organizations, especially the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC).[11] Late in 1998, the government of Colombia and the FARC began a peace process that included concession by the government of a large zone in eastern Colombia from which government authority and force were withdrawn. During most of the peace process period, Colombian President Andrés Pastrana constrained the military from taking any major offensive actions, including within Medellín. This nearly unilateral constraint lent a degree of freedom of action to various armed groups, including and especially the FARC.[12] On February 20, 2002, President Pastrana announced that the peace process was terminated, conceding to detractors of the process that the FARC had not been acting in good faith and that no progress toward peace had been achieved.[13] This event, and public realization regarding the

---

[8] ―This advance led to the emergence of five new communities: La Independencia I, La Independencia II, La Independencia III, Nuevos Conquistadores, and a good part of El Salado, which in approximately five years accommodated more than five thousand families; at the time, the advance was worthy of being considered the most voracious invasion of Latin America, or rather the largest development in the least amount of time—more voracious than the slums of Mexico City and the favelas of Sao Paulo…" Aricapa, pp., 7,8.

[9] Instituto Geográfico Agustín Codazzi, *Atlas de Colombia*, (Bogotá: Imprenta Nacional de Colombia, 2002) p. 196, 197.

[10] For a thorough, if tendentious, statistical analysis in support of this assertion, see, Claudia López Hernández, ed., *Y refundaron la patria…De cómo mafiosos y politicos reconfiguraron el Estado colombiano* (And They Re-founded the Nation…How Mafiosos and Politicians Reconfigured the Colombian State) Most of this books' data comes from the Resource Center for the Analysis of Conflict, CERAC. See http://www.cerac.org.co/en/.

[11] From author interviews with Colombian military personnel who wish to remain anonymous. To the author's knowledge, this is not a disputed assertion. See, Semana, ―La primera batalla final," 10 November, 2003, *Semana*, <http://www.semana.com/nacion/primera-batalla-final/74497-3.aspx>.

[12] See, for instance, Ramiro Ceballos Melguizo, ―The Evolution of Armed Conflict in Medellín: An Analysis of the Major Actors" Latin American Perspectives, Vol. 28, No. 1, *Colombia: The Forgotten War* (Jan., 2001), 110-131. ―The Colombian State has neither the power nor the authority to settle social conflicts or enforce the law. It is obliged to negotiate its own sovereignty with the other, alternative powers." Ibid., p. 112.

[13] See, Andres Pastrana, ―Final Proceso de Paz - Alocución Presidencial - Febrero 20.2002," *Vimeo*, <http://vimeo.com/27208756> .

mens rea of the FARC leadership, radically changed the parameters of engagement in Medellín, releasing the army and national police to act. During the middle months of 2002, after May elections, which brought the more militarily assertive administration of President Álvaro Uribe Vélez to power, *Comuna 13* became center stage of a series of government efforts at pacification and control in the city. These operations, dubbed in general, ‗Mariscal,' appeared to be failures until October, when Operation Orion finally succeeded in changing the security condition within the borough. [14] (The relative success of Operation Orion stemmed from a decision on the part of the military and civilian authorities to maintain a permanent, physical presence of all parts of the government within the *Comuna*, often on the most conflictive pieces of terrain.)

b. Medellín was a geographic focus of leading anticommunist/anti-FARC armed self-defense consortiums, the dominant and prevailing among these becoming the Self Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC). The AUC gained widespread popular and political support in northwestern Colombia, including among wealthy business interests. Perceived inadequacy of the Colombian government under President Pastrana's administration to effectively challenge the FARC militarily, along with a legacy of official paramilitary institutional organization, led to vigilantism on a significant scale.[15] This vigilantism paralleled and melded with illicit drug operations, metastasizing to become as much of a menace to public security as was the FARC, at least in some of the country's departments.[16] While perhaps effective against the FARC in some battle zones, the AUC soon joined the ELN and FARC on the US State Department's official list of terrorist organizations due to its immane behavior.[17] It also joined in the fight for *Comuna 13*.

c. The international cocaine trade had begun to boom in the 1980s, and with it new and powerful criminal organizations, several of which were headquartered in Medellín. Pablo Escobar was killed in Medellín in late 1993, but his legacy was a city overfilled with dispersed, experienced and ruthless drug networks. Moreover, takedown of the Escobar organization, and along with it the reduction of other Aburrá Valley cartels, opened seams to competition from Cali-based drug lords.

d. Preferred transportation routes for the movement of everything (including drug processing precursor chemicals and weapons) between the northwestern coasts and central Colombia are constrained into the Aburrá Valley, which the city straddles.

Especially while rural violence pushed, and illicit money pulled people to the city, smaller areas of terrain within the metropolitan area became objects of intense violent competition. These competition geographies seem to be defined by typical urban economic considerations. Needy and entrepreneurial individuals apparently chose proximity to urban services and jobs, informality of land ownership, and price.[18] Partly, the violence can be traced

---

[14] Names of operations in order

[15] The argument or justification for Colombian vigilantism is encapsulated by the statements of Carlos Castaño, deceased leader of the AUC, in Mauricio Aranguren Molina, *Mi Confesión* (My Confession), (Bogotá: Oveja Negra: 2001). In synthesis, Castaño argues that the war has lasted 40 years because of corrupt governments who have been in a symbiotic relationship with the guerrillas to the benefit of a few and the expense of the majority. See p. 283, ibid.

[16] See, for instance, Ramiro Ceballos Melguizo and Francine Cronshaw ―The Evolution of Armed Conflict in Medellín: An Analysis of the Major Actors" *Latin American Perspectives*, Vol. 28, No. 1

[17] On the question of Colombian massacres see, Geoffrey Demarest, ―Section 18: Massacres" in *Winning Insurgent War: Back to Basics* (Ft. Leavenworth: Foreign Military Studies Office, 2011), pp. 55-57.

[18] That the decisions were ‗natural' requires some additional argument, for which I depend generally on Robert Ardrey, *The Territorial Imperative: A Personal Inquiry into the Animal Origins of Property and Nations*. (New York: Antheneum,1966).

to spontaneous reaction to infrahuman conditions. Absence of basic services such as sewers and restrooms, for instance, would spark offenses to personal dignity, leading to the rapid formation of alliances for protection and revenge.[19] Other groups formed around electricity, cable or potable water piracy. Aside from these primordial needs (if the need for cable TV can be so designated), a more sophisticated violence arose, also encouraged by the absence of formal authority, but in response to the potential illicit uses of the peripheral slums as described in the first paragraph above. Some uses were influenced by larger war strategies, especially of the government and the FARC. Their ‚peace process' allowed some additional freedom of presence and action on the part of some IAGs, including leftist guerrilla organizations, but, on the other hand, spurred antiguerrilla paramilitaries to organize, which in some locales had the effect of stymieing guerrilla advances, but via violent confrontation. These war-induced decision factors aligned with the existing currents of urbanization to assure deadly competition among more than a half-dozen ruthless identities. Listed briefly, these included Medellín Cartel remnants, the Cali Cartel, the FARC, the Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN), urban splinters of the FARC and ELN, the AUC, local militias/brigands, especially an ELN spin-off calling itself the Comandos Armados del Pueblo (The Peoples' Armed Commandos, CAP), as well as an assortment of free-lance local thugs.[20] These various IAGs took on a slang categorization with a musical referent as *bandas*, *combos* or *orquestas*. Add to the friction a not-always noble and incorruptible police force.

The developmental histories of autochthonous slum IAGs are significantly different than those of outside groups, and this is reflected in their land use.[21] Violent groups that form from within a slum do so in relation to relatively un-valuable or un-exportable services and commodities, and so are undercapitalized, often wanting of effective leadership and without strategic objectives or ideological emotive power as compared to outside groups.[22] This is, to a degree, self-evident, given that the more powerful external IAGs are able to venture into the slum from a distance precisely because of their relative power.[23]

The Illicit Land Uses Considered

1. Taxation. *Comuna 13* is for the most part a hilly borough comprised of 20 *barrios* or neighborhoods. Several of these are relatively more affluent than the rest. The owners and residents of lower-middle and middle class apartments and condominiums suffered depredations from the near-by, up-hill and more lawless neighborhoods of the *Comuna*. Statistics compiled on market movement and rental values of properties over time show a clear pattern of value exhaustion as the more formal (usually downhill) properties suffered their proximity to the less formal areas.[24] Moreover, local real estate experts claim certain exceptions, such as property values in the immediate proximity of *moteles* (rent-by-the-hour trysting facilities especially

---

[19] See, Aricarpa, p., 10.

[20] For a description of the evolution of Medellín IAGs, see generally Ceballos and Cronshaw, Ibid.

[21] The term *ontogeny* is appropriate if the biological analogy is not overly pursued, but *suppuration* might be a better term yet.

[22] These outside groups must be taken as collective *identities* rather than as stable organizational units (a given identity may or may not be stable as to membership) because service to, solidarity with or membership in an outside group may or may not include slum-originated individuals, and any individual associations may be part or full time.

[23] Concomitantly, the degree of danger to the larger city and region outside the slum correlates to the out-sidedness of the IAG. That is to say, if the IAG identity is original to the greater metropolitan area, but not the slum, it will not be as dangerous to the surrounding city or to the nation as an outside-the-slum IAG original to another region, and less dangerous still than one with significant origins in another country.

[24] See, La Lonja de propiedad raiz de Medellín y Antioquia, *Real Estate Consultancy Medellín Comuna 13*, (Medellín: La Lonja de propiedad raiz de Medellín y Antioquia, 2008).

popular in some Colombian cities). The exceptions can reflect the greater disciplining capacity of outside IAGs, who are more likely to be financially or socially invested in moneymaking activities that attract monies from outside the *Comuna*. In the two or three years preceding Operation Orion, apartment vacancies rose in the *Comuna*, and many condo owners abandoned their real estate altogether or rented for almost nothing in order to have someone occupying them. Allegedly, many of the stay-behind individual renters in these fire-sale properties were agents of outside IAGs. In effect, residential and commercial real estate proximate to areas of organized criminal competition and territoriality is highly price-sensitive.[25]

For the autochthonous gangs, taxation will be a cruder form of protection racket than for the larger IAGs. The outsider gangs are likely to invite the local gangs either to participate directly with them or pay tribute. The squeeze is on when two competing outside gangs offer similar deals to the same local gang. The autochthonous gang is generally forced to decide for one outside IAG or another, and typically then becomes subject to proofs of loyalty that involve acting as the front-line troops for that IAG. An advantage that the local gang holds often comes in the form of personal relationships with local authorities, which offers the possibility of effectively informing on one of the outside gangs. The risk in this option often lies in the fact that the larger the outside gang, the greater the possibility that it has infiltrated the police apparatus to some degree.

2. Illicit free trade. As in many polities, legitimate government in Medellín looked at sinful behavior with an eye toward regulation, believing that a measured level of regulation could allow satisfaction of the basic demand and provide tax revenues while still limiting the exposure of protected classes (children) to the sin. For instance, rules were developed to regulate prostitution. Prostitution was legalized, while pimping (managing the commercial activities of a prostitute) remained illegal. All prostitutes had to have registered electronic accounts, and a great portion of the business went to a prepaid format in which customers would buy pre-paid cards and all the money from the use of the cards would go to the registered accounts. As with most enterprises, regulation implies business costs, which are avoided by the business if possible. The measures tended mostly to separate economic classes of the prostitutes. Nevertheless, one clandestine activity leads to or attracts another. As the sale of drugs, drugs for guns, computer hacking etc., began finding space in or near *Comuna 13* (because formal law enforcement found it less and less possible to safely enter the borough), those activities also began to shadow, to some degree, the prostitution for reasons of money laundering, communications, etc. Still, gains by the police against the anonymity enjoyed by one form of criminal behavior were likely to break down the anonymity of other illicit activities. For the autochthonous groups the advantages of free trade are similar, but for goods and services of lesser value, if of greater immediate need, e.g., water, electricity. Some highly point-specific locations were identified as most coveted for predation, and so the real estate around these points became some of the most dangerous.

3. Sanctuary. Beyond free trade, outlaws need places to rest, recuperate, plan and heal. Distant rural areas present the same challenges of access and supply to the outlaw as they do to everyone else, so for some IAGs, having a closer-in urban harbor is a significant advantage. Yoni Rendón transmits the explanations of a reinserted Comuna 13 youth who had belonged variously to a local gang, the Army, the ELN and later the ELN again. The young ELN guerrilla

---

[25] While it is difficult to measure the illicit ‚taxation' suffered by local residents in terms of its amount or frequency, criminal predation probably has a finely quantifiable effect on real property prices.

would typically transfer members wounded in combat, say, in the Catatumbo area near the Venezuelan border, to *Comuna 13* in Medellín for medical care and recovery. It is worth noting in regard to urban sanctuary that the seeming absence of some individuals in specific locations is as revealing for some intelligence purposes as is their presence. Because of the inconsistency between medical care and active defense, the ELN might feign absence from parts of the city.

Sanctuary for the autochthonous groups has a distinctly different calculus in that they are likely to enjoy the favor and protection of family, but this simultaneously makes many locations inapt as sanctuaries for the same obvious forensic reason.

4. Clandestine manufacture or processing. Counterfeiting CDs, money, tickets, ID cards, uniforms, keys, etc. is typical for some slum areas, including parts of *Comuna 13*. As the outside IAGs became customers, they all but invariably wanted to exclude other IAGs from a particularly lucrative, empowering, or protective activity, causing much of the cross-cutting and violence mentioned regarding free trade and taxation. As any process becomes more complex, such as counterfeiting IDs, which requires knowledge beyond the confines of the locality, outsiders are more likely to be seeking sanctuary inside the locale, rather than the local groups seeking larger markets.

5. Staging for violent operations outside or on the fringes of the slum. The FARC had long maintained a strategic vision that included an eventual urban offensive. In this context of the larger insurgent war, ideologically motivated and driven by large scale interpretations of national key terrain, some of the IAG activity in *Comuna 13* was prospective – in preparation to implement the call for sabotage, compartmentalization of streets, strangulation of official movement, and popular uprising that had long been made a staple of Latin American guerrilla design since outlined by Guevarra, Marighella and Debray.[26] Medellín, for its strategic location, economic significance, new-urban demographics, and its being a bastion of neoconservative and anticommunist thought, was always on the guerrillas' strategic short target list for eventual take over. Implantation of FARC cadres and solidarity-building within the peripheral slums seemed a necessary step, one the FARC attempted to accelerate in the 1990s. The FARCs advantage lay in its ability to maintain rural presence outside the city. The ELN also coveted urban space in Medellín, for compatible reasons, if with a more regionalized emphasis: the strategic lines of communication for the ELN moved in part through Medellín northeast through what is known as the Medio Magdalena (middle reaches of the Magdalena Rive centering around Barrancabermeja) toward the border of Venezuela. Given the evident importance of Medellín to the guerrillas, the paramilitary AUC began to take a subsequent interest in control of the city's periphery. Major drug dealers became major land owners of mountain ranches and villas just uphill from the city.

Beneath the national strategic designs of the communist and anticommunist irregular armies, lesser IAGs found some neighborhoods in the *Comuna* to be ideal staging areas for out-of-borough predatory attacks in the more central parts of the city. Kidnappings, robberies, and even assassinations in service of the larger IAGs could best be conducted from the peripheries, often using motorcycle techniques, multiple taxi systems or other methods for efficient perpetration and then retreat to sanctuary.

---

[26] See, Brian Loveman and Thomas Davies, *Che Guevara Guerrilla Warfare*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985), pp. 75-77 for a concise assertion regarding the urban insurgent sabotage mission, need to propagandize, and the normal vulnerability of the guerrilla in urban areas.

6. Safe transit of contraband. An ancient rural trade route from Urabá Department and the border areas with Panama leads through Santa Fe de Antioquia (now a tourist center to Medellín's northwest), then passes through *Comuna 13* on the way into and through Medellín. There are several major routes in an out of Colombia, but this is one of the best for moving east to west. Because of the presence of many industrial and manufacturing enterprises in the Aburrá Valley, the movement of illicit drug precursors or war materiel enjoys natural concealment and ease of explanation. The local gangs only find this to be an advantage to the extent they can safely effect tolls for going through their territory. Depending on their ability and willingness to bring violent force to bear, they will share in the tolls, surrender an informal easement to the larger IAGs, join those IAGs, or be killed.

7. Recruiting. Recruiting assassins, hostage-takers, drug transporters, informants and messengers became widespread in the *Comuna*. These jobs, however, were paid best and most quickly by the illicit drug dealing organizations. In the period of increasing violence during the two years before Operation Orion in October of 2002, the ELN and the FARC both conducted presence operations in *Comuna 13*. These followed a basic pattern of observation and identification of personality types suitable for a variety of missions, followed by selective threats and recruitments. The ELN, however, withdrew months before Operation Orion began. In part this was due to incipient armed confrontation between the FARC and the ELN, which the ELN felt it could ill afford to wage. It was more significantly due, according to evidence found in captured computer materials, to a determination by ELN leadership that the individual character of the recruitment-age males in the slums was unsuited to the revolutionary cause. The ELN had been spending resources in slum areas with the intention of recruiting revolutionaries, but seems to have found that, unlike many rural youths, the slum teen-agers were defiant, disrespectful, gratuitously violent, relatively lazy except to party hearty, and unimpressed by revolutionary arguments -- especially when they did not include a distribution of booty. The male population at least had been infected by a drug and youth gang culture unsuited to the establishment revolutionaries.[27] Meanwhile, other agents found many young men perfectly suited to their business models. The FARC, for instance, had mastered outsourcing, especially for kidnapping and assassination. Moreover, the more vicious and entrepreneurial IAGs offered employment for very young males (eight or nine years-old to make deliveries and as outlooks) and for teen and preteen girls (mostly as informants, sexual servants or both).

8. Storage and disposal of victims. *Comuna 13* was used as a temporary holding location for kidnap victims and was ostensibly used as a disposal zone for corpses. The nature of this latter use is so controversial and emotionally and forensically sensitive that it cannot be described with any detail at this point, and substantial use of the zone for this purpose has not yet be shown to a degree sufficient to move any prosecutions. However, it is clear that many bodies were dropped at the nearest hospital in San Lorenzo (one of the *comuna's barrios*), a few common graves were uncovered and anecdotal evidence suggests that more will eventually pop up.

---

[27] Perhaps the best Colombian book to deal directly with the nature of gang culture in Medellín is Alonso Salazar J., *No nacimos pa'semilla: La cultura de las bandas juveniles en Medellín* (We were not born to (sow) seeds: the culture of youth bands in Medellín) (Bogotá: Planeta, 2002); Also well-known and dealing directly with the violence in Medellín slums is Jose Alejandro Castaño, *Cuánto cuesta para matar a un hombre?: relatos reales de las comunas de Medellín* (How much does it cost to kill a man?: real stories from the slums of Medellín (Bogotá: Norma, 2006).

Counter-IAG land-use response

A prevailing economic theory posits violence as a simple preference. Douglass North, in particular, outlined the idea of transaction costs as related to conflict.[28] People will resort to violence when the cost of so doing is perceived to be less than the cost of nonviolent transaction.[29] The land-use activities posited above each can be considered in light of the fact that nonviolent mechanisms for determining (especially among IAGs) who would enjoy unfettered and unsanctioned illicit land uses were often not available. Meanwhile, illicit land-use activities displayed specific architectural preferences, market evidence, legal quirks or deficiencies, or associated human habits signaling or canalizing the whereabouts of IAG perpetrators.[30]

The responses to illicit land use by the government in Medellín were, in great measure, land-use responses. The city administration decided to build a cable car (as an extension of the metropolitan public train system) that would open the neighborhood at depth. The administration created a planned neighborhood for new arrivals to the city that was separated from the older neighborhoods of the *Comuna*, thus taking pressure off small territorial conflicts. The city finished an auto tunnel that would shift and canalize licit traffic through the borough. It centralized and rationalized the registration of and payment for city services. It formalized all streets and addresses so that warrants could be legally served on the basis of an accurate census.[31] The payoff to government police and military comes in the form of forensic geography – profiling likely locations of IAG members at times when they can be apprehended or served process. Licit enterprises requiring legal land uses within the neighborhoods, especially those in formal tax compliance, are less likely to coexist in places subjected to IAG taxation. Correlations of real estate with active legal taxation and regulatory compliance, as well as the availability of land-use conflict resolution mechanisms, are themselves evidence geographically outlining the presence of internal and external IAGs.

While land-use categorization and mapping can reveal patterns and correlations useful to geographic profiling and other forensics, they can also form the basic information with which to build and maintain a peaceful social contract over the long-term. In *Comuna 13*, the government secured those points of land which had prompted the fiercest competition. The police built a fortin on the most militarily dominant terrain within the *Comuna*, and the

---

[28] Douglass C. North & Robert Paul Thomas, *The Rise of the Western World, A New Economic History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973); and *Structure and Change in Economic History*, New York: Norton, 1981. North asserts that peaceful transaction costs would be higher than violence if it were not for the invention of systems that encourage fulfillment of contractual obligations.

[29] John R. Umbeck, *A Theory of Property Rights: With Application to the California Gold Rush* (Ames, Iowa: The Iowa State University Press, 1981). ―No individual would be willing to accept a contract in which he was assigned property rights of less value than he could obtain by personal violence." Ibid, 9.; These theories are not incompatible with the body of political science theoretical writings on so-called war-economies. See , for instance Nazih Richani, ―The Political Economy of Violence: The War-System in Colombia" *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*," Vol. 39, No. 2 (Summer, 1997), 37-81.

[30] Recognition of the correlation between informal real property ownership and organized urban violence has been substantial in Colombian government and academe. See, for instance, Carlos Alberto Montoya C., ―Ilegalidad de vivienda=limitación para el desarrollo urbana" (Illegality of residences equals limitation for urban development) in Presidencia de la República, *Medellín: Alternativas de Futuro* (Medellín: Consejería Presidencial para Medellín y su Area Metropolitana, 1992), 287-290.

[31] Ongoing *Comuna 13* research benefits from detailed daily logs of police and military activity during the pair of years before Operation Orion, as well as select information from interrogation and arrest reports. These and other data may expose physical, actuarial and psychological signatures of illicit slum land-uses.

Colombian Army stationed detachments in various properties that had also been the most contended.

Government planners determined that certain acts of violence correlated to the absence of public utilities, as opposed to territorial fights over illicit trafficking routes. Partly on the basis of this analysis they were able to redirected or relocate some marginally licit activities, create and manage programs to keep children in school buildings, create safe places where residents could report evidence of strangers and criminal organizing, etc. Perhaps most intriguing, the government assured that streets were clearly named, addresses specific, residents registered by location and ownership rights formalized. Among other effects, this allowed legal searches and the presentation of valid arrest warrants. Today in 2011, *Comuna 13* has been suffering a moderate relapse into gang violence, although the leadership and membership has changed. That is to say, the land-use changes and analyses applied by Medellín do not address the whole challenge of urban peace. Medellín's government has proven that they help. The military and civilian decision in 2002 to take back, hold, and then build within *Comuna 13*, both in terms of physical infrastructure and governance, permanently changed the scale and nature of the security challenge.

Looking at IAG presence through the lens of land use can contribute positively to the construction of an urban counter-crime, counterinsurgency, and sustainable development method (probably in Geographic Information System (GIS) format). The government in Medellín had already been constructing its understanding of city management around land-use planning principles and the use of high-end GIS technologies. Success of the Colombian security forces in Medellin can be attributed, in part, to their acceptance and adoption of city planning language and method.

Geoffrey Demarest is a researcher in the US Army's Foreign Military Studies Office at Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas. He holds a JD and a PhD in International Studies from the University of Denver. He is a graduate of the US Army War College at Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania, and of the School of the Americas at Ft. Benning, Georgia. Demarest's latest book is titled, Winning Insurgent War.